

The Coeur de Lion and the *Anima Mundi*

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“Let us have the courage to look in the eyes of our children and admit that we have failed.” That stark message came from Ahmed Djoghlaif in October 2010, when he addressed the international Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) at a summit in Nagoya, Japan. As executive secretary of the CBD at the time, Djoghlaif lamented that countries were nowhere near to meeting the treaty’s chief goal of “significantly” cutting species loss by 2010. Instead, he said, “we continue to lose biodiversity at an unprecedented rate” (Tollefson, Jeff, and Natasha Gilbert. “Earth Summit: Rio Report Card.” *Nature* 486, no. 7401 (June 6, 2012): 20–23).

In a recent op-ed article in the New York Times, ecologist Roger Bradbury writes,

It’s past time to tell the truth about the state of the world’s coral reefs.... They have become zombie ecosystems, neither dead nor truly alive in any functional sense, and on a trajectory to collapse within a human generation. ...[T]he global coral reef ecosystem — with its storehouse of biodiversity and fisheries supporting millions of the world’s poor — *will* cease to be. (July 13, 2012)

These two very public statements are unusual in that rather than presenting us with hope, they ask us to confront our *failure* to save our world, contending that our insistence on privileging hope over truth no longer serves us. Though we have the technology to build zero-waste, zero-carbon cities, end world hunger, manage population growth, and cease nuclear proliferation, the world is held hostage by a catastrophic failure of human will. We are presented with a hopeless image of a world inexorably doomed to destruction, and it is a difficult but important message. According to James Hillman, “that pathologized image of **the world destroyed**, [*symbolizing a negated world*] is awakening again a recognition of the soul in the world. The *anima mundi* stirs

our hearts to respond: we are at last, in extremis, concerned, concerned about the world; love for it arising, material things again lovable. For where there is pathology there is psyche, and where psyche, eros” (2007, p. 126). 2:30

The Heart of the Lion

In his essay *The Thought of the Heart*, Hillman describes three modes of responding to the world, which he calls disguises of a heart in exile. Today I would like to begin by speaking about one of the disguises, the Heart of the Lion, and then talk about a way *out* of exile through what Hillman calls the aesthetic response to the world, or the Heart of Beauty.

The Heart of the Lion, or the *Coeur de Lion*, feels appropriate to our conference topic because it is the heart of the political activist, the hero, the rescuer. If anyone is going to save the world, it is the lion-hearted. I remember one of my professors once telling his students, “Don’t just do something, *sit* there.” While the value of this statement is not lost on Jungians, the idea of “sitting there” is tortuous to the heroic heart of the lion. No, this heart *springs* us into action, it is the activist heart, driven by passion, life-force and desire (or what Corbin calls *himmā*), fired by the alchemical sulphur that gleefully flares and erupts with fervor and zeal. Hillman says,

Crucial to the heart of the lion is that it *believes*, and it believes that it does not think. So its thought appears in the world as project, desire, concern, mission. Thinking and doing together. This is the bold thought that takes us into battle...” (p. 11).

The outward focus of this heart “produces what Jung has called the “dark body” at the core of ego – consciousness, its blindness to itself.” Because it sees only externally, it identifies with the world it beholds, its thought “completely coagulated into its objectifications” (Hillman, 2007, p. 12) Psychology calls this love in the heart of the lion

compulsive projection. Thus, the task of consciousness here lies in recognizing “that its actions, desires, and ardent beliefs are all imaginations...and that what it experiences as life, love, and world is its own *enthymesis* [or life force] presented outside as macrocosm” (Hillman, 2007, pp. 13). While the traditional task is to recognize and take back these kinds of projections, Hillman likes Giegerich’s (2005) approach – don’t just sit there, *leap* after the projection and reclaim it as imagination! As Hillman says, “To desire and to see through desire – this is the courage that the heart requires” (2001, p. 15)

Because the heart of the lion merely acts out its urgencies, going directly, just like that, to the problems of the world to be solved, it lacks psychological conscience (Giegerich, 2012). It reacts to things in the world as literal, given over to the concrete object before it, without wasting a thought on the subject, on what it itself as heroic problem-solving consciousness is doing. It does not ask itself, “Who?” is attempting the saving, and “What?” is imagined in need of salvation. Lion-hearted interaction with the world, while compelling and passionate, comes from a consciousness still blind to itself, unable yet to imagine the very soul of the world it is trying to save.

The Whitening of the Heart

Yet we *need* such a heart - “it is by means of the lion in the heart that we perceive and respond imaginally” (2007, p. 74). It is the mighty roar of the lion that shocks the still-born cubs into life. We need the heart to roar. The task therefore is not to kill the lion but to wake it up to itself as thought. According to Hillman, the heart of the lion awakens in the aesthetic response. But first the red lion heart must be alchemically whitened.

According to Jung, “The phase called whitening in alchemy refers to the emergence of psychological consciousness, the ability to hear psychologically, and to perceive fantasy creating reality” (CW6:78).

The heart is whitened through its own weakening, illusions, and failures. “When the sulphur whitens within the heart, we feel at first discouraged...weakened. The heart now discovers its own inhibition and, driven in on itself, it feels both its desire and its inability, passion without seizure, compulsion and impotence together, “I want” and “I can’t” at once” (2007, p. 71).

Wolfgang Giegerich (2005) notes the profound confrontation between “I want” and I can’t” as critical to soul-making. In his dialectical model, the infinite imaginal dimension of interiority, or the realm of soul, comes about through the negation of externality, which in turn “is possible only through the negation or self-contradiction of a *passionately attempted forward movement.*” “*I want*” and “*I can’t*” together. According to Giegerich, “The move into transcendence...is not a soaring higher and higher up beyond the earth and beyond the clouds into outer space. On the contrary, since it is negative (frustrated) movement, it stays put” (2005, p. 16, my emphasis). We are to “stay put” as it were in a near intolerable state, the heart alchemically cooking in its own blood, as Hillman describes. It is the whitening of hopelessness and despair, utter failure and frustration, devoid of possibility. This is the image evoked by the two statements I read in the beginning of my talk. Bradbury and Djoghlaif ask us to linger in the very painful reality that we have failed one another and the world, signaling this crucial alchemical shift in perspective, the whitening of the heart.

The state of perception given by the accomplished whitening is exquisite, “de-bridged of literalisms,” every image beheld symbolically, teeming with the living soul that is actually there. In this state, the anima mundi is speaking, *and we are finally able to hear*. Red passion is whitened to compassion.

The Roar of Beauty

The lion heart awakens in the aesthetic response, in the breathtaking ROAR of beauty. Hillman wants to awaken the heart. He asserts, “Of all psychology’s sins, the most mortal is its neglect of beauty” (2007, p. 35). He explains, “If beauty is not given full accord in our work with psyche, then the soul’s essential realization cannot occur” (2007, p. 42). Yet not beauty in the way we typically know it, reduced to a pleasing aesthetic presentation, or a source of objectified pleasure. Nor the perversion of beauty into a characteristic to be possessed. Rather, fundamental beauty given by the very act of creation. Hillman writes:

Beauty is the manifest *anima mundi*...and refers to appearances as such, created as they are, in the forms in which they are given, sense data, bare facts, Venus Nudata. Aphrodite’s beauty refers to the luster of each particular event – its clarity, its particular brightness. (2007, p. 43)

The apprehension of beauty as such is the apprehension of the soul in a thing. The inability to perceive beauty was noted by Donald Meltzer as a ubiquitous feature of psychosis, “namely the failure of apprehension of beauty through a powerful emotional response to its perception” (2008, p. 2). Hillman (2007) reminds us that in the ancient world the organ of perception was the heart, the word for perception being *aisthesis*, meaning “a breathing in or taking in of the world, the gasp...of the breath in...amazement” (2007, p. 107).

Such a beholding would be a fundamental change in posture, a move from mental reflection to aesthetic reflex, an awakening of the imagining, sensing heart. Here we find a radical shift in perspective from heady cognition to deep and exquisite appreciation of beauty, in which we value

soul before mind, image before feeling, each before all...rhetoric before truth, animal before human, anima before ego, what and who before why. (2007, p. 128)

The idea is that such an extraordinary awareness of the *anima mundi* would inspire appropriate civic action. Hillman says, "An aesthetic response is a moral response" (p. 62). A heart numbed to the aesthetic world, both beautiful and ugly, *has no response* to what it faces. "[T]he question of evil," states Hillman, "refers primarily to the anesthetized heart" (2007, p. 64). Hillman states:

Ecology movements, futurism, feminism, urbanism, protest and disarmament, personal individuation cannot alone save the world from the catastrophe inherent in our very idea of the world. They require a cosmological vision that saves the phenomenon 'world' itself, a move in soul that goes beyond measures of expediency to the archetypal source of our world's continuing peril: the fateful neglect, the repression, of the *anima mundi*. (2007, pp. 126-7)

Seeing the world as ensouled honors the mystery of each thing's existence, respecting its inherent value and sovereignty. Because if we do not see a world ensouled, what kind of world are we trying to save? The absence of soul leaves us with a dead, empty, barren place, a world with no inherent dignity and no thing sacred. *This* is the catastrophe of which Hillman speaks.

In Hillman's appeal for a cosmological vision for the world, I believe he is asking us to step back and experience our response to image. In beholding the breathtaking beauty of the *anima mundi*, we are to ask her for our place, meaning, and purpose in the world in relation to the rest of creation. I wonder too if what Hillman is really talking

about is falling in love with the world. Because when we are in love, the image of our beloved is always on our minds and in our hearts, and there is nothing we would not do to save her.

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